

VA**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

News Release

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During National Volunteer Week, April 13-19, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is honoring volunteers who contributed nearly 14 million hours of service to the nation's veterans in fiscal year 1996.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown said, "For more than 50 years, VA and the nation have benefited immeasurably from the generosity of volunteers who give their time and their hearts by serving patients in VA hospitals. We owe them a tremendous debt."

Brown noted that the monetary value of the time contributed by volunteers last year was more than \$175 million. Volunteers and their organizations generated another \$40 million last year in direct gifts and donations.

VA's Voluntary Service has grown to become the largest volunteer program in the federal government. Since the program began, volunteers have donated more than 455 million hours of service to VA patients, and the number of regularly scheduled volunteers has risen to more than 98,000.

Though local volunteer aid to VA medical centers began well before World War II, in 1946 VA established a Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee with representatives of the major veterans groups. Today, 60 national veterans service, civic and fraternal organizations serve on the Committee, giving direction for the recruitment, training and placement of volunteers in medical centers.

More than 350 organizations represent voluntary interests on advisory committees at local hospitals. The vast majority of VA volunteers work at VA hospitals, but volunteers also assist VA national cemeteries and regional benefits offices.

At medical centers, their roles range from traditional ones, such as escorting patients and assisting in recreation activities, to nontraditional assignments outside of medical centers in such programs as hospice care and home-based primary care. Opportunities for medical center volunteers also exist in patient education, advocacy and services supporting patient care.

At cemeteries, volunteers provide military honors at burial services, plant trees and flowers, and place flags on graves for Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

Younger volunteers in VA medical centers work in such areas as audiology and speech pathology, dietetics and physical therapy. Scout groups assist in landscaping and decorating at VA national cemeteries.

Anyone interested in volunteering at a VA medical center should contact the voluntary service office at his or her local facility. Those interested in volunteering at a national cemetery or regional benefits office should contact the directors of those facilities, listed in telephone directories under U.S. Government.